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Budget plans aren't clear for oil and gas regulation



An Enervest drill site in Parker County on Oct. 12, 2012 Ron Jenkins - Star-Telegram archives

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Natural gas drilling and production in the [Barnett Shale](#) formation in and around Tarrant County isn't booming like it was a few years ago, but people in this part of the state should still take a keen interest in how Texas regulates that activity.

After all, the boom-and-bust cycle of the oil and gas industry could turn to boom again.

That's why the [Texas Railroad Commission](#) and legislative action with regard to it is so important.

Remember that the Railroad Commission has [nothing to do with railroads](#) and hasn't since 2005. It is the state's oil and gas industry regulator.

The name of the commission really should be changed — as has been proposed in the last two legislative sessions.

But hiding behind an obscure name seems preferable to the commission's leaders and the lawmakers who support them.

The [Sunset Advisory Commission](#) (five senators, five representatives, two public members) [voted back in November](#) to strike the idea of a name change from this year's report to the Legislature.

Still, there are other crucial things to watch.

Initial [reports last week](#) from House and Senate budget-writing committees showed sharply different proposals from the commission's budget.

Most of its money comes from fees paid on oil and gas activities, but the Legislature still has to allocate it to the commission.

The Railroad Commission has been complaining for months that the slowdown in oil and gas activity has left it short of funds, including money needed to plug abandoned wells and clean up drilling sites.

The commission asked for an additional \$45 million in the next two-year budget. The initial House budget offers \$35 million. The Senate would actually cut \$13.6 million, almost 8 percent, from the agency's budget.

In a related matter, the Railroad Commission is depending on a study from the University of Texas at Austin's Bureau of Economic Geology to help it determine how to prevent earthquakes — many in North Texas — induced by the drilling industry's wastewater disposal wells.

The initial Senate budget would strip funding from the Bureau of Economic Geology; the House version would allocate almost \$3 million to it.

Lawmakers must figure out how to pay for the Railroad Commission's important work.

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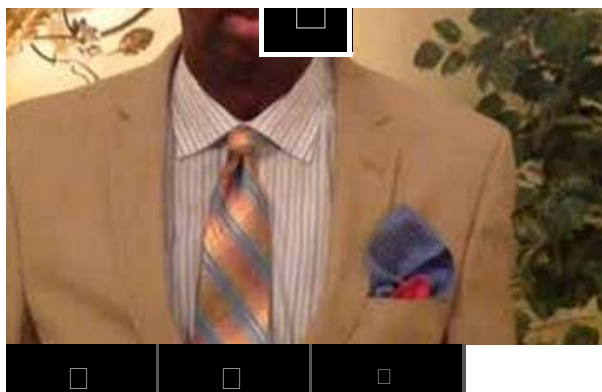
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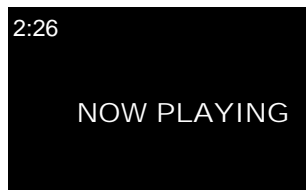


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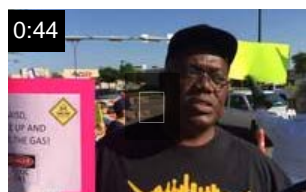




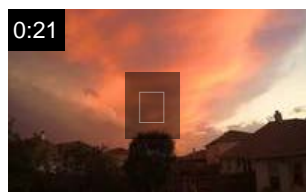
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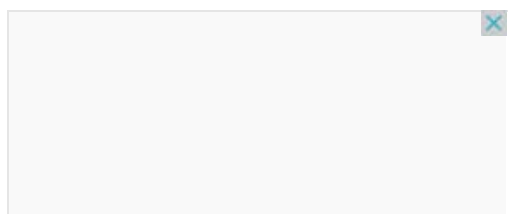


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